

wet and water-logged, studded all over with spiky roots, or rather aerial root-suckers, jutting out from the subterranean roots of the forest trees, made it impossible for me to make any headway to get a closer view of the nuthatches abounding there. The trees along the comparatively higher bank of the *khal*—notably Keora (*Sonneratia apetala* Ham.) which is characteristic of Sunderban river banks—were noticed to harbour quite a large flock of these birds, and from the boat I did actually shoot some specimens, but the tides stood in the way of my retrieving any except one. Its measurements are: wing 70, tail 43, tarsus 17, culmen 13 mm.

It is worthy of note that nowhere in this area was *Sitta castanea* Less. noticed, though it is quite a common and numerous species, which I often encountered, in the evergreen forests considerably inland. Regard being had to its known period of breeding, its occurrence in these parts of the Sunderbans in the beginning of August might indicate its status as a resident species. While its favourite haunts appear to be the inland tree forests the distribution of *S. frontalis* Swains. is evidently related to the forests at the sea face or those in the neighbourhood. Wherever during this trip the species came under my ken, it appeared to have a preference for keora trees, whether of stunted size as are general along the sea face, or of medium height as are found a little away from it. In its haunts in inland swamp forests *S. castanea* Less. seems to be partial to mature keora trees.

50 KAILAS BOSE STREET,

CALCUTTA.

S. C. LAW, M.A., Ph.D., F.N.I.

April 21, 1948.

### 13.—ON THE OCCURRENCE OF THE BLACK-HEADED CUCKOO-SHRIKE (*LALAGE SYKESII*) AT AHMEDABAD, ABU ROAD AND AJMER.

According to Hugh Whistler the north-western limit of the Black-headed Cuckoo-Shrike is a line drawn from Kangra through Sambhar to Mt. Abu. This being the case any record of observations of the bird at places situated along this line, however incomplete, may be of some value.

The Black-headed Cuckoo-Shrike is not, in my experience, a bird whose movements can easily be studied and worked out. It is shy of close observation and is most readily detected by its loud and distinctive call note uttered as it moves about inside the foliage of large leafy trees. In these circumstances it might easily be overlooked during the silent phase. I have always presumed it to be absent when its call-note is not to be heard and have certainly never seen it at any other time except the vocal season.

I saw the bird first at Abu Road during the monsoon of 1928 and wrote a description of it to the B.N.H.S. for identification on 17th August 1928. A single pair inhabited the railway officers' cantonment throughout that monsoon and were seen about until some

time in September, but were not seen thereafter until the time of my transfer to Ajmer in March 1929. The bird was *not* seen in Ajmer throughout the summer and monsoon of 1929, although I was watching for it.

In 1931 I was stationed in Ahmedabad and on a visit to Abu Road saw a bird there on 6th July. On 10th and 12th July respectively a hen and a cock bird were seen in my compound at Shahibag, Ahmedabad.

On 19th July Mr. Symes, Executive Engineer, Abu Road, wrote that he had seen a pair of birds moving about in the compound next to his own and that they seemed to be taking an interest in a particular nim tree. He did not, however, find any nest that year.

In the spring of 1932 I was myself transferred to Abu Road and heard a Black-headed Cuckoo-Shrike calling on 13th May and again on 16th May. Thereafter it was seen and heard frequently until 22nd September, but no nest was found.

In April 1933 I was again posted to Ajmer, but the bird was *not* seen *nor* heard there throughout the summer and monsoon.

I was stationed in Ahmedabad from November 1934 until March 1938, but did little bird watching for the first two years and have no records at all for 1936. On 3rd July 1935 I heard a Black-headed Cuckoo-Shrike calling in my compound in Shahibag and saw the cock bird on the 4th July.

On 21st May 1937 I heard and saw a cock bird in my compound. Mr. Symes writing to me from Abu Road reported hearing one on the same date but not since (letter dated 25th May). I continued to hear the bird in my compound until 28th May, but thereafter did not hear it again until 13th June.

On 20th June Mr. Symes wrote to me again that he had found a nest in his compound at Abu Road and that the bird was sitting. On 8th July he found the nest deserted and the birds building again.

During the monsoon of that year I heard and saw Black-headed Cuckoo-Shrikes frequently in and around Ahmedabad. My last record of seeing a bird that year was in Ahmedabad on 23rd August 1937.

In 1939, on a visit to Ajmer, I was surprised to hear the well known call of a Black-headed Cuckoo-Shrike on 24th June, but did not actually see the bird. However, on a subsequent visit on 8th August I saw a cock bird. This was a famine year and the total rainfall in Ajmer was only about 4 inches.

In 1940 I was stationed in Ajmer and naturally kept a very sharp look-out for a reappearance of the bird. I heard it calling first on 29th May and again on 13th June, but did not see it on either occasion.

I saw the bird first on 20th June 1940 in my compound and thereafter heard and saw birds of both sexes on numerous occasions and my last record for that year was on 16th August. So far as I was able to make out there were at least two pairs in the railway contonments.

Early in May 1941 I was posted to Ahmedabad. I heard a bird calling in my compound on 25th May and heard and saw it at intervals until the end of June. Thereafter I had no time for bird

watching on account of floods and breaches which kept me fully occupied.

These records are scanty enough and the only definite conclusion which can be drawn from them is that the Black-headed Cuckoo-Shrike seems to have extended its range to Ajmer some time between 1933 and 1939. In both 1929 and 1933 I had the opportunity to devote a great deal of time to bird watching and could scarcely have missed a bird with which I had become so familiar in Abu Road, especially as I was posted from Abu Road to Ajmer on both occasions. There was famine in Rajputana from 1938-1940 and it is possible that the bird was forced to extend its range locally on this account.

I do not know on what evidence Hugh Whistler has defined the N.W. limits of this bird. Throughout a hot weather and monsoon spent in Fatehgarh, U.P., I never encountered the bird, nor have I found it at Kotah, Rajputana. Round Baroda it is quite common; far more so, it seemed to me, than round Ahmedabad. It is possibly only a breeding migrant to Rajputana and if this is the case it is probable that it moves up the Aravalli Hills from the south rather than in from the west or north.

1/B, IMPERIAL MANSIONS,

CUFFE PARADE, COLABA, BOMBAY, 5.

R. M. SIMMONS

January 17, 1948.

#### 14.—THE STATUS OF THE DUSKY WILLOW-WARBLER [*PHYLLOSCOPUS FUSCATUS* (BLYTH)] IN INDIA

In his 'Systematic Review of the Genus *Phylloscopus*', published in 1938, the late C. B. Ticehurst gives the winter range of *Phylloscopus fuscatus* as 'Nepal and Sikkim at low elevations; N. Bengal; Buxa and Bhutan Duars; Assam; Manipur; Burma; Shan States, etc.' The rest of the winter range is further east. It is the purpose of this note to give evidence for my belief that *Ph. fuscatus* has a much wider winter range in north and central India, and that it has presumably hitherto not been separated from *Phylloscopus collybita tristis*, from which it only differs very slightly in general colour, though the colour of the soft parts and the call-note are quite distinct.

My evidence is based entirely on field observation, and the various species of *Phylloscopus* are so difficult to distinguish in the field that it may be thought that such identification is unsatisfactory. I would point out, however, that the two species here under consideration, namely *Ph. c. tristis* and *Ph. fuscatus*, are both species which habitually feed on or near the ground, so that one may often watch them hopping about at only a few yards distance, when every point of plumage is almost as easy to note as if the bird were in the hand. It will be best, however, if I give my evidence in full, and I must then leave it to the reader to decide whether it is convincing.

The first records are really much too meagre in detail to be satisfactory, and I should not trouble to give them were they not